This is a pre-print version of Palacio's webtext Review of *The Age of the Image* published in Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy, 23(2), available at http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/23.2/reviews/palacio.

The Age of the Image: Redefining Literacy in a World of Screens. By Stephen Apkon. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. 263 pp. $15.00 (paper)

Video Transcript [Part 1]

The first discussion in the book surrounds the prevalence of screens in today's society. As our interaction with digital technology increases, we rely more on visuals to present information in a catchy and innovative manner. According to Apkon (2013), "when you tell a good visual story, you are creating a mysterious chain of events in the viewer's mind with every electronic visual choice you make, and the final truth and beauty of it depends largely on the degree of literacy brought to its creation" (p. 31). To continue this topic, he invites the reader to a conversation that discusses our interaction with technology as creators and audience members, and how such interaction shapes our literacy practices regarding visual media.

In all, the beginning of the book is a good reminder to the reader of how much interaction society has with screens, and directly with technology, and how the response to the content, presented on the screen, will be influenced by our own literacy of the visual. A discussion about literacy regarding the visual is very important because we can no longer rely on the definition of literacy as the ability to read and write. Digital technologies, like the screen, have caused an evolution in the definition of what it means to be literate, and in order to tell good visual stories, we need to understand the rules that guide the creation of visual content.

Just like concepts of written texts and principles of composition exist for writing, an equivalent idea exists for visual media. Apkon calls this idea "grammar of the visual," and he explains this term in the book by comparing it to writing. Writers employ tools like pen and paper or keyboard and printer, along with style and grammatical rules, in order to generate content. Similarly, visual story tellers use cameras, microphones, and editing systems to create a story, along with their own style and grammar rules, such as frame or everything we can see, sound or everything we can hear, and editing or everything that constructs a story, to also generate content.

The text then explores the historical background of literacy with the beginnings of recorded communication. The cuneiform is mentioned, followed by technologies like papyrus, the alphabet, the printing press, photographs, and other similar visual representations of information. Adding emphasis on the visual, specifically the movie, Apkon discusses the delivery of content by film and mentions that "the combination of moving image, spoken word, text, and music, makes the movie the most powerful and compelling text that has yet been created" (p. 39).

With the discussion of new tools for creating content, along with an increased use of the screen to present information, the reader begins to understand the need for a larger conversation about visual literacy, also known as the process of generating meanings in transaction with multimodal ensembles (Serafini & Gee, 2017). As more individuals understand visual literacy, they will accept and embrace visual stories as being complex items of communication just like text and speech. With writing, we have been exposed to grammar as a way to understand the rules that make up our language and the way letters interact with each other to deliver comprehensive information.

And similarly to writing, Apkon sees the tools and skills behind film as its own type of grammar, one of the visual, that if used correctly, will help creators generate works that will successfully communicate information through screens. He is right in asking for users to be aware of the rules behind the creation of visuals and of the users' own visual literacy, because visual literacy is a cognitive and ongoing process. It requires users to be able to cross between modes and develop interpretations when interacting with visual images and other multimodal forms of communication (Serafini & Gee, 2017).

Video Transcript [Part 2]

Moving through the book, Apkon (2013) introduces examples of scientific studies to discuss reactions that visuals generate on audience's minds. He touches base on the connections we make in our brains, as viewers, when we see specific visuals and how such connections can be measured through brain scans using electrodes or MRIs and can be visually presented as highlighted zones in our brains. For example, one of the studies discussed is a 2004 experiment at the University of California–Los Angeles where participants, who were patients undergoing brain surgery, were fitted with electrodes and shown a series of photographs and were later asked to recall the same images in order to see the link between the participant's mind when seeing the picture and later on recalling the picture. The results of the experiment showed a major connection between the two actions as the same neuron areas lit up when the patients looked at the images and when they recalled the images (p. 79).

Another experiment of similar results included a study directed by Professor Malach, from Weizmann Institute of Science and Professor Fried, from UCLA and Tel Aviv University where they looked to understand the emotional responses that our brains have when we view images. The experiment dealt with patients viewing 64 video clips including visuals from *The Simpsons* to movies with Tom Cruise. After viewing the clips, the patients were asked to speak into a microphone and describe what they saw. In a similar set of results to the previous study, when the brain activity of the patients was measured during the responses, the same activity took place in the neurons of the patients' brains when they looked at the clips and when they recalled them (p. 80).

Recalling these two examples, Apkon mentions that "images and visual processing directly linked to a natural behavior, while the language of words is more recently evolved, and necessitates an indirect path from reception to cognition" (p. 80). The brain scans were pivotal in showcasing how much activity takes place in our brain when we interact with visuals. Such scientific discussion helps Apkon argue for the need of better visual literacy as he shares through these studies of how the brain stores information to be later used as a tool when interpreting visuals.

The scientific discussion is also a precursor to Apkon's main talk about audience, technology, and the increased use of video as a form of communication. He also emphasizes on the role of audience interpretation when interacting with visuals, especially if not enough context is provided in the images, and the changes that technology brings to the idea of authorship. Because there is more accessibility to technological devices and software, videos can be created

for everything and by everyone. Without the proper knowledge of visual grammar, the rules and tools for creating visuals, the video content may not generate the response it intended in the first place. Also, authorship can be questioned with visuals because more than one person participates in their creation.

Because the grammatical knowledge for creating visuals is needed, Apkon's book looks to provide such guidance by including a guide to using visuals as tools of communication. Just as if it were a guide on writing, Apkon guides the reader on how to "write" (and I am using air quotes here) the visual by using different methods of the film industry like angles, audience, shots, cuts, sound, and more. Apkon presents each element of the visual and how it should be treated by the filmmaker or writer in a way that is approachable and relatable to already common knowledge, like a book of grammar would for written text.

Video Transcript [Part 3]

As the book reaches the last two chapters, Apkon discusses the role of visual media in education. He presents examples of classrooms that use media labs and video projects instead of essays, in order to showcase the benefits of the use of new media in the life and educational development of participating students. While education has always been focused on preparing people for the workforce, with the proper skills and knowledge, Apkon mentions that "the skills needed to compete fully in the global economy need to also evolve" (p. 212). That evolution surrounds the need to place more emphasis on the importance of visual literacy among younger generations, and the classroom is a great starting point.

Writing will always be skillful knowledge to have, but it will be even more beneficial if the writers can translate their work into different modes of delivery and content creation and understand that visual communication also has its rules and guidelines of creation, its own grammar. Apkon encourages us to view our current educational system through a lens of visual communication, as it will help students develop skills that not only surround our classic communication practices, but newer practices that are valued in the workplace. Visual literacy allows students to think critically, to communicate effectively, analyze and solve problems creatively, and collaborate (p. 214). It can also be a motivational skill for students to interact with more technologies and begin to experience different career paths involving visual creations, communications, rhetoric, and much more.

With the state of education and visual literacy still in mind, Apkon ends his book with a chapter that again discusses the presence of the screen in society, but this time with a focus on how the definition of literacy changes according to how and when we circulate information. Also, he touches base on the collaborative aspect of digital media with sites like YouTube, which allows users to experiment with visual communication and allows viewers to share the content they see with a simple click. An example like YouTube is important because it is a platform that not only allows creators of visual content to share their work, but it also allows the audiences to participate and interact with the content through comments, likes, dislikes, and sharing. With those ideas in mind, creators will highly benefit from having knowledge of grammar of the visual. Close to the last page of the book, Apkon says the following:

> Visual literacy is the new frontier, one not limited to scribes, but open to all of us. And for the first time in the history of the planet, it has an instant global reach. It will not wait for the sluggards. We must adapt with the changing times and acquire the necessary skills in order to have full access to this opportunity–to remain competitive and engaged. Because, ultimately, one of the most rewarding things we can do is tell our stories and hear the stories of others. It is one of the fundamental cures for loneliness throughout time, a means of human connection. (p. 250)

This quote is powerful and informative. It serves as a great reminder of what Apkon has discussed all along, and it is a call for us to take action and really think about our own visual literacy and that of future generations.

This book is a powerful and eye-opening read for anyone interested in the role of communication and content creation, whether written, verbal, or visual. Like Apkon, I agree with the need to redefine and expand the definition of literacy to include visuals and digital technologies. A more open definition of literacy broadens the idea of communication as something that goes beyond writing or speaking. Visual stories take up much of the tools and knowledge used for written stories, like audience consideration, planning, organization, "writing" (once again, in air quotes), and editing.

In order to show the similarities between written and visual communication, Apkon organizes the content in a chronological way to keep the audience informed and ready for the next section of information. Like the guide to creating visual stories presented in the chapter "Grammar, Rhythm, and Rhyme in the Age of the Image," Apkon considers his audience and provides context to his ideas through historical background about the evolution of communication and scientific background about the interactions that take place in our brains when we encounter visuals.

He reveals his theory of visual literacy through different examples of places where the visuals are part of everyday life such as advertisements, company logos, television, PowerPoint presentations, and newspapers, and how the different interactions benefit each of the individuals using the new media. Apkon says that "just as the writer has tools and structures to use in his craft, so, too, does the visual storyteller." He adds that "concepts of written texts and principles of composition and grammar have their equivalent ideas in visual media, which is 'written' with a different set of tools" (p. 159).

I appreciate that Apkon sees the creation of visuals as writing and can adapt the writing process to that of film or video making. As an academic in training, I see this book as a read for various courses within the field of writing and rhetoric as much as film and new media studies. The content presented by Apkon will generate insightful discussions among students of visual rhetoric, rhetorical criticism, beginning composition, and other subjects surrounding content creation and literacy of mediums of communication. The examples used throughout the book are welcoming and would certainly keep students interested in the content, not only because it is accessible, but also because the process of creating in film, as presented by Apkon, is a great way to present composition to the students who are just starting their training in writing.

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